



TITLE:

Book reviews: John Kleinan and Manon Osseweijer, eds. Pirates, Ports, and Coasts in Asia: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives. Leiden: IIAS; Singapore: ISEAS, 2010, 299 p.

AUTHOR(S):

Tagliacozzo, Eric

CITATION:

Tagliacozzo, Eric. Book reviews: John Kleinan and Manon Osseweijer, eds. Pirates, Ports, and Coasts in Asia: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives. Leiden: IIAS; Singapore: ISEAS, 2010, 299 p.. 東南アジア研究 2011, 49(1): 151-152

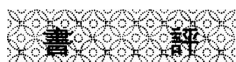
ISSUE DATE:

2011-06-30

URL:

<http://hdl.handle.net/2433/151870>

RIGHT:



John Kleinan and Manon Osseweijer, eds. *Pirates, Ports, and Coasts in Asia: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*. Leiden: IAS; Singapore: ISEAS, 2010, 299 p.

Pirates, Ports, and Coasts in Asia is an important new contribution to the literature on piracy in Asian seas. As the title suggests, the authors were looking to go beyond an examination of piracy wholly on its own, and sought instead to link predation on the high seas to the maritime littoral in general, and to sea-based cities in particular, in their analysis. The thirteen chapters in the book are united in keeping the focus of attention on sea-strand relations, and one never seems to be too far from the other in the three hundred pages that make up this book. This in itself is an innovation of sorts, as many earlier attempts to deal with piracy in Asia have dwelt too much on the high seas and not enough (perhaps) on the coasts that supply people, ships, and material to make piracy possible in the adjacent waterways. Kleinan and Osseweijer likely had a discussion with their authors ahead of time on this theme, and the book holds together nicely in that the authors seem to have taken this duality seriously, each in their own work. We don't see much of the sea here without feeling a breeze from land, too, and this is important overall.

The book is organized into three asymmetrical parts. In Part I, consisting of an introductory essay by the authors and a useful article by Michael Pearson on the definition of piracy in Asian waters, some of the main lines of the volume are laid out. Kleinan and Osseweijer lay out the circumstances of the construction of the book, which had its origins in a conference in Shanghai in 2005. They talk a bit about the social-scientific directions of the book, before providing summaries of the essays in the volume themselves, each of which is described in more or less a paragraph of text. Pearson's initial essay complements this overview of

the book by getting at some of the definitions of piracy in these waters going back to Early Modern times. His contribution is useful in that it situates the bulk of the study to come with some conceptual questions which are then explored in the book. It might have been useful here to have asked a third, non-Asia-focused specialist to weigh in on how piracy in Asia might differ from versions of this activity elsewhere in the world (off the Horn of Africa, perhaps, or in the Caribbean, two other hot-spots of global piracy). I could not help wondering if someone like Markus Reddiker, for example, whose books on piracy and sea-board life in the Atlantic, might not have had something useful to say about these articles as a collective, even if his own expertise is derived from analogous activities on the other side of the world.

Part II then delves into the history of piracy in East Asia in four essays. Robert Antony starts out nicely by looking at a maritime border-town between China and Vietnam (Giang Binh, in the Tay-son era around the turn of the nineteenth century), before Hoang Anh Tuan provides an exegesis (somewhat derived from his excellent book *Silk for Silver: Dutch-Vietnamese Relations*) on Tonkin's role in the piratical and trade currents of the seventeenth century. Two other essays, by Paola Calanca and John Kleinan, then square the narrative more centrally on East Asian seas, as they examine the coasts of Fujian and the story of a single ship (the S.S. *Namoa*, pirated off the coast of Guangdong in 1890), respectively. These are all interesting essays, filled with a wealth of primary-source detail (and some very good broader theoretical musings by Kleinan in particular), but it seems slightly "off" to call this section "East Asia." Fully half of the narrative here takes place in Vietnamese waters, which may indeed be a maritime frontier zone of sorts between East and Southeast Asia but which seems slightly ghettoized by placement into only one of these designations here. This organizing rubric for the book might have been usefully deconstructed a bit further, with perhaps a different reference point rather than "East" and "Southeast" Asia serving to bundle the assembled essays. The sea, after all (and obviously) is fluid — such land-based monikers seem

somehow strangely out of place here.

Part III, the last section of the book, then brings up the rear with fully seven essays on “Southeast Asia.” All of this literature concentrates on the island world of Southeast Asia, and there is almost nothing here on the long outstretched coasts of Burma, Siam, and Cambodia, for example, and also little on the Malay Peninsula. This is a lacuna which should have been filled, likely, so the book might have had better balance. While it’s true that there is less literature on these coasts, and that piracy may have been practiced less here, too, than in the Insular world of Southeast Asia, this lack of material gives the book a feeling of slightly skewed orientation. I should be clear that the essays that are indeed here are very good ones; these are the main authors in the field, and the work that they exhibit here is nuanced and complex. Adri Lapien talks about piracy in Indonesian waters generally in his piece, and then Gerrit Knaap, Esther Velthoen, and Carolin Liss all discuss variations of piracy across several time periods in Papua, Sulawesi, and Sabah respectively. All are accomplished essays, which provide a very good balance between hard data and conception on the how’s and why’s of piracy working in these far-flung locales. Three other essays then problematize these ideas even further, as James Warren, Stefan Eklof Amirell, and Ikuya Tokoro all examine different avatars of the subject in one place, the Sulu Basin at the southern end of the Philippines. These essays too are accomplished, each and every one, with much that is new on display, as the Sulu Sea is dissected vis-à-vis its maritime dynamics from colonial to post-colonial to “ethnographic” time, and across the centuries. It is very helpful to have these three essays together here, in fact, because one can see how various methodologies can be used to describe the same place, and how piracy looks different according to the tools being used in one’s own study.

Pirates, Ports, and Coasts in Asia is a good book, and more than this it is a useful compendium which repays a serious reading and careful consideration of its contents. Many of the world’s academic experts on Asian piracy, both historical and contemporary, are on

view here, and these are all serious scholars who have thought about these issues for a long time (and in some cases, for a very long time, including pioneers of the field in Warren and Lapien’s cases). The book is however slightly uneven, as I have described above, with perhaps too much attention paid to Insular Southeast Asia, and too little paid to Japanese and Korean waters (where are the *wako*, for example?), and the long outstretched coasts of the Southeast Asian mainland. Presumably to fit into the book’s title, some attention should have been paid to Indian Ocean piracy as well, of which there was plenty, and which still (of course) exists even now, though on a smaller scale than in previous centuries. I would recommend this book to anyone who wants to see strong, solid scholarship on the notion of piracy in Asian waters, and a number of the essays really do fit very well together in sets (on Sulu; on the Outer Islands of Indonesia; and on the Sino-Vietnamese frontier, for example). The book — already useful — might have been still stronger, however, had it aimed a bit more for geographic inclusion in its contributions, so that more territory could have been covered. This would make an already-utilitarian volume, impressive in many ways in its own right, even more of a contribution to a field that only seems to be growing year after year.

(Eric Tagliacozzo · Cornell University)

||| Duncan McCargo. *Tearing Apart the Land: Islam and Legitimacy in Southern Thailand*. Ithaca: |||
||| Cornell University Press, 2008, 264 p. |||

This well-written and researched book provides a much-needed detailed analysis of the violent conflicts in three Malay-Muslim provinces of southern Thailand — Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat. The author, one of the most prolific scholars of Thai politics, challenges two commonly evoked explanations that attribute the conflicts to primordial ethno-religious differences and to region-wide or global terrorist “Jihad” networks. McCargo argues, instead, that the violence is fundamentally a